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TAGS: [OPRC](#) [KMDR](#) [TU](#)
SUBJECT: ANKARA MEDIA REACTION REPORT
WEDNESDAY, MARCH 14, 2008

In Today's Papers

PM Erdogan Rejects Meeting with DTP
Radikal, Cumhuriyet, Yeni Safak, Sabah, Milliyet and others: Prime Minister Erdogan told reporters yesterday, "DTP deputies asked me for an appointment, but as long as the Democratic Society Party (DTP) does not refer to the PKK as terrorist organization, I will not meet with them." Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet quotes PM Erdogan as saying "I tasked an AKP deputy group chairman and the deputy prime minister to meet with the DTP delegation. As long as the DTP, which exists under the roof of the parliament, does not declare the PKK a terrorist organization, I will not meet with them as the prime minister of the Republic of Turkey. EU countries and the US declare the PKK as a terrorist organization, but I cannot accept a political party who does not declare it as terrorist organization." In response to Erdogan's remarks, DTP Group Chairman Ahmet Turk said "it is not correct for the PM to make statements which will strain society. Is the prime minister trying to send a message to the judiciary? The DTP is exerting serious efforts to overcome this painful period through democratic civilian methods. We believe that the duty of the prime minister is to achieve social compromise."

Labor Unions Protest Social Security Law
Cumhuriyet, Radikal, Milliyet, Sabah and others: Emek Platform, a gathering of Turkish workers' unions, will suspend work for two hours today to protest the social security and health insurance bill passed by the Parliamentary Budget & Planning committee on March 6. The bill raises the retirement age to 65 and the numbers of days they have to work in order to retire to 9.000. Mainstream Milliyet reports that the protest will affect transportation, cleaning, education and healthcare. Leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet's headline reads "Workers' Strike Rehearsal" and reports that the unions' platform held rallies throughout Turkey yesterday and released a joint statement saying the workers will not accept the social security bill.

Gul: Democratic Openings can Isolate Terror in Southeast Turkey

Islamist-oriented Zaman reports President Abdullah Gul talked to reporters aboard his plane while en route to Dakar, Senegal for the Organization of Islamic Conference (OIC) summit talks. Gul said, "The recent ground offensive in northern Iraq showed that nobody can force Turkey to do anything at gunpoint." In addition, he emphasized, "Turkey has shown its determination to fight against separatist terrorism. Under no condition will Turkey allow an internal armed struggle. This was the real message of the Turkish offensive in northern Iraq." He also said he felt Massoud Barzani "got the message." Gul underscored that the PKK was a threat to Iraqi Kurds and the recent meeting with the Iraqi President Jalal Talabani was "very important." Gul noted he wants to visit Baghdad, but emphasized military measures alone cannot resolve the Kurdish question. He suggested that a democratic opening could help isolate terror in the region. Gul stated that compulsory religious education must cover a spectrum of religions and not focus solely on Islam. "Nobody is happy with the existing situation," said Gul.

Erdogan's 'Kurdish Package' gets Mixed Play in Papers

Islamist-oriented Zaman says the Southeastern Anatolia Project (GAP) represents the backbone of the "southeast package" explained by Prime Minister Erdogan in an interview with The New York Times. Ten hydroelectric power plants, twelve dams, twelve organized industrial zones, new roads, new health centers, and new educational institutions will be constructed in the southeast over the next five years. \$13 billion in investments will create new job opportunities for 3.8 million people, writes Zaman.

An analysis in leftist-nationalist Cumhuriyet is doubtful that Erdogan's "package" for southeast Turkey will become a reality. "The GAP lies at the core of the package, but the ruling AKP hasn't invested a single penny in the project over the last six years,"

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says Cumhuriyet. The article points to the huge number of villagers with no land, tens of thousands of children who cannot attend school, and some 30,000 children working on the streets in Diyarbakir. "Such factors stoke not only political terror but societal terror as well. The PKK, Hizbullah, and al-Qaeda all feed on this swamp; Erdogan's Kurdish package must beat this cancer," comments Cumhuriyet.

A column in mainstream Hurriyet says this was the 18th economic package announced for southeast Turkey. However not one of these packages has been implemented.

Editorial Commentary on the 'Kurdish Package'

"Is There Anything New on the Settlement of the Kurdish Issue?" Cengiz Candar wrote in the business daily Referans (3/14): "PM Erdogan once again talked about investment plans and promises on the settlement of the Kurdish issue. Even if the promises are kept and investment plans are implemented, such measures may not be good enough to settle the issue. Economic and social development does not address the identity issue. To what extent will the AKP government be able to distance itself from the traditional approach on this issue? The traditional approach treats the Kurdish problem as a security and a socio-economic issue. The AKP government seems to be going back and forth between the traditional approach and ways to address the Kurdish identity problem. There is also a connection between the pending article 301 and the Kurdish issue. Without clarifying all the problems over freedom of expression, there is no way to gain momentum on the Kurdish issue."

Paper: PKK and al-Qaeda to Join Forces in Iraq

Islamist-oriented Zaman cites the Qatar-based al-Arab daily as reporting al-Qaeda and the PKK held talks for "military coordination and cooperation." According to the paper's interview with al-Qaeda leader Sheikh Abu Halil Bahadili, al-Qaeda will provide intelligence support to the PKK, which, in return, will provide weapons and shelter to al-Qaeda militants in Diyala, Mosul, and Kirkuk. Bahadili also pointed to Monday's suicide attack in Suleymaniye in northern Iraq as a result of the cooperation with the PKK.

Editorial Commentary on the PKK/al-Qaeda Alliance

"A PKK and Al-Qaeda Alliance?"

Ibrahim Karagul wrote in Islamist-leaning Yeni Safak (3/14): "If the PKK and al-Qaeda are creating an alliance, it seems the effort has one clear goal. If the PKK is dissolving, this alliance creates another source of fear for Turkey. If the PKK dissolves, there are two possible results and both are equally frightening. A radical Islamist Kurdish movement could emerge, and could even wind up forming a Kurdish Hamas. In reality, PKK and al-Qaeda have absolutely no connection regarding their ideology, goals, tactics and organizational structure. Also, there is no known connection between Hamas and Kurds. Moreover, drawing a parallel between the Palestine issue and the Kurdish issue is not constructive or accurate. Nevertheless, if we can assume the PKK-al-Qaeda alliance is true, it really means the demise of the PKK."

Higher Education Board (YOK) Council Convenes

Sabah, Yeni Safak, Vatan, Milliyet, Radikal and others:

Mainstream Sabah reports that YOK General Council convened yesterday under the YOK Chairman Yusuf Ziya Ozcan for eight hours. During the meeting, the turban issue was not discussed. Turkish Statistics Institute President Associated Professor Omer Demir was appointed as acting president. The YOK Council decided to make a decision on turban after the Constitutional Court resolution.

Editorial Commentary on Turkish Democracy Debate/Islamization

"The Gradual Islamization of Our Daily Lives"

Columnist and popular anchorman Mehmet Ali Birand observed in

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mainstream tabloid Posta (3/13):

"The AKP government is changing our society. I observe a fast-spreading change in the attitudes of top government officials, cabinet ministers, and their appointees. This social transformation is slowly spreading across other sectors of society. A different approach and a new way of life are emerging from the ghosts of the past. This is not happening through orders and directives from the top, but from social reverberations stemming from the general behavior and the attitude adopted by AKP officials. These officials range from the prime minister down to the simplest district head. There are changes in verbal and body language. There is change in eating and drinking; alcohol is gradually leaving the table. There is constant change in women's clothing and also a change in daily life, where the separation of men and women is more noticeable. Moreover there is change in the media. There is a considerable increase in the number of newspapers and television channels that promote religious values, Islam and the Islamic world. And there is a change in capital. There are more religious corporations founded each day than ever before. People who did not even rate a nod yesterday now take part in huge tenders and make enormous amounts of money. This trend does not necessarily happen through open or secret directives of the AKP. A different lifestyle is automatically spreading from top to bottom. There are those who feel this lifestyle originates from the ruling party. Another group is made up of those who now dare to do what they could not before. And finally, there are those who join the ride to fill their pockets and to protect their own interests."

TV News:

NTV

Domestic News

- The Prime Ministry said the measures announced by Prime Minister Erdogan in an interview with The New York Times were announced earlier by the PM.

- The mayor of the mainly Kurdish city of Diyarbakir, Osman Baydemir, faces trial for printing and distributing a book of Turkish and Kurdish short stories. The prosecutor demands up to 3.5 years in prison for Baydemir. This was the 24th lawsuit filed against Baydemir over the last four years.

- A bill for removing landmines from the fields along the Turkey-Syria border was submitted to the parliament for approval.

- A court in Ankara has decided to block access to YouTube because of 'insulting footage' against Turkey's founder, Mustafa Kemal Ataturk. Access to the site has been blocked both in terms of the Internet provider and the domain name.

International News

- In an interview with Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung, Prime Minister Erdogan says the government has taken unprecedented measures to resolve the problems in southeast Turkey.

- The Serbian president dissolves the parliament and called for early elections following his rift with nationalists over Kosovo's independence and Serbia's EU integration.

- China responds to a US report critical of its human rights record by releasing its own review attacking America's rights record as "tattered and shocking."

WILSON